DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 413 535 CE 075 281

TITLE	Make Lemonade. Author: Virginia Euwer Wolff. Trade Book Teaching Ideas from the OLRC Reading Group. Teacher to Teacher Series.
INSTITUTION	Kent State Univ., OH. Ohio Literacy Resource Center.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. for Literacy, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1997-11-00
NOTE	9p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; *Classroom Techniques; *Learning Activities; *Literacy Education; Reading Materials
IDENTIFIERS	*Make Lemonade

ABSTRACT

The book "Make Lemonade," by Virginia Euwer Wolff, consists of 66 short chapters in which a stream of consciousness-like style is used to tell the story of a young unwed mother of two children and her 14-year-old babysitter who wants to earn money to attend college and improve her life. This 7-page guide contains teaching suggestions for using "Make Lemonade" with adult literacy students. Six teaching ideas are detailed along with discussion questions and learning activities that are designed to be used as students complete specific chapters of "Make Lemonade." The results of a field test in which "Make Lemonade" was used with three classes of teenage parents in an inner-city literacy program are reported. Concluding the booklet are a directed reading-thinking activity and a description of the K-W-L instruction strategy in which students identify what they Know, what they Want to find out, and what they have Learned. (MN)

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039-0300-0017
November 1997

Ohio Literacy Resource Center

Enhancing adult literacy in the State of Ohio

Teacher To Teacher

ED 413 535

Trade Book Teaching Ideas from the OLRC Reading Group

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Make Lemonade

Author: Virginia Euwer Wolff

Summary: This book consists of 66 short chapters that tell the story of a young unwed mother struggling to raise her two children alone in a hostile inner-city world, and of her 14-year-old babysitter who wants to earn money to go to college and improve her life.

Introductory Notes: Wolff uses a very unusual style to tell the story, a kind of stream of consciousness that sounds like speaking, and a line format on each page that looks like poetry. This style may initially put students off, but as they become comfortable, perhaps with a bit of guidance on the part of the teacher, they will come to see what a powerful way Wolff has of telling a story. Her method may have more in common with storytelling or perhaps oral presentations that with typical novelistic writing.

The following teaching suggestions offer many ideas of how to approach the book. Note, however, that there are way too many here for most learning situations. The teacher or perhaps the class should decide which ones to pursue. This book poses many possibilities for social action projects and dozens of places where students may want to respond personally through journal writing or discussion. Please tailor the book and the suggestions to the needs and interests of your group.

Teaching Ideas

You may want to begin by asking students to look at the graphics on the book cover, to read the synopsis on the back cover, to look at the dedication, and to consider the title. What does the title suggest?

a. If someone is familiar with the saying, "If life gives you lemons, make lemonade," ask that person about the context when he or she heard that phrase. Ask the group to discuss what the statement means.

b. If no one comes up with the statement, write it on the board and ask the group to verbally explore possible meanings.

Chapters 1-27 (part one):

1. Read the first few pages aloud and ask students to follow along in their copies. In some situations where students know each other well, they may choose to read a page or two. Often students prefer to practice reading a page silently or at home before they read aloud, but once they are comfortable, they no longer feel this need to practice and really enjoy seeing how their fluency grows. You should be very sensitive to the group on this point. Because of Wolff's style, this book can be read aloud very effectively, and in fact needs to be read aloud in the beginning until students become comfortable with the style. We suggest that throughout the reading of the book, the class from time to time spend ten minutes reading various chapters aloud together.

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2. Use a DR-TA (see attached). Stop reading after p. 8 and talk about what you think might happen between Jolly and LaVaughn. First of all, will LaVaughn take the job? What will LaVaughn's mom say? Will the two become friends? What else do you foresee? Read on through page 21, and then go back to the ideas you had. How did your predictions pan out?

3. Ask the whole class to keep a journal, writing in it after every reading, where they record

   a. Emotional reactions to Jolly, her children, LaVaughn, and her mom.

   And/or

   b. Reactions to the language used by Wolff. Keep a list of especially wonderful words and phrases or images, such as the metaphor of the bird (p. 3), the picture of "somebody without teeth talking to herself"(p. 6), "her mouth goes open and shut for bananas" (p. 48), "little cells of stuff popping out" (p. 55).

   And/or

   c. Their own stories that may parallel Jolly's or LaVaughn's. Students may want to write about sexist bosses like Jolly's or the drive and ambition of LaVaughn's mother, or the influences on them that made them turn out the way they have.

Be sure to vary your responses so that you don't just do one of these three.

4. Talk about what LaVaughn learned on p. 50. Would students have done the same thing? Did she do the right thing? In those moments, when we react to what children have done wrong, what helps make a decision on how to behave? Some people say that all of parenting (or babysitting) is doing to another child what happened to you. Do students agree?

5. When you've finished Part One, the students in the class may want to step away from the actual text and discuss what resources in your community would be available to Jolly and her children. Create a K-W-L chart, filling in the K and W parts together. Each class member could volunteer to research one piece of information (ex. What inexpensive child care is available for single moms? What does social services suggest? Make a phone call and find out.)

Chapters 28-43 (part two)

1. Ask each student this: Now that you have completed a section of the book, reflect on your reading skills. Do you find Make Lemonade easier or harder to read than books written in a more conventional style? Is the format natural to you now?

2. Back in Chapter 23 and now in 28 Jolly talks about men. Ask your class to comment on these chapters. It may be hard to have a talk about abuse and the ways men and women treat each other, but this may be a "teachable moment" and one worth exploring. If your class consists of both men and women, and emotions are fired, you may want to turn this into a writing/reflecting assignment that they do on their own. Or you may want to channel the discussion into a search for information (where do women go for help when their bosses molest them?) or for action (when is the next Take Back the Night rally?)

3. On page 91, Wolff writes,"We must have looked like some kind of family." Think about the families you know, the traditional ones and the ones that are very unusual. What makes a family? Which ones work best? Why?

4. Continue with the journal writing. From time to time ask students if they would be willing to share their journal entries with the rest of the class. This is often less scary if you mark a few sentences from each student's journal and ask them if they would be willing to read aloud just those few marked sentences at a certain time in the class. Orchestrate a class discussion, where you weave the students' comments in.

5. Before you finish this part of the book, you may want to check on their reading skills (reading for details, reading for inferences) by asking them what they know about LaVaughn's parents. Perhaps you would want to create another K-W-L

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chart. Ask them if they can find the specific references to her dad.

6. Ask each student to write an autobiography of their city experiences: describe the places where you have lived in the city and what your physical environment looked like. Relate your personal experience to the big city institutions (like the social services system, public transportation). Tell about the communities you felt part of (or didn't) or what role crime and fear played in your life. Describe the parks or the schools or apartment living or whatever figured significantly in your city life. End with your commentary on how you feel about living in cities today.

   Use the assignment to work through all the phases and thinking of the writing process.

   Perhaps students should first work individually, jotting down the dates when they lived in cities and the important facts. Then together you can brainstorm how to carry out this assignment. Does anyone know of a good autobiography to use as a model? How should a good one read? Each person should jot lists of what details they might want to include, and then work with a partner on which are the necessary or best ideas.

   Write up a draft and share some of the draft with a different partner, giving each other feedback about what is and isn't clear, what needs more information, etc.

   Write a second or third draft, this time asking a partner for input on both ideas and mechanics. Attach all the drafts, and when you feel you have a polished draft, turn it into the teacher for suggestions and comments and then for inclusion in a class book.

   This assignment may stretch on until the class is finished with the entire book. Encourage students to enrich their drafts by incorporating ideas that occur to them while reading the book and while listening to class discussions.

<u>Chapters 44-56 (part three)</u>

1. After reading 44, ask the students to take a minute in class to think about any teachers they had that made a difference, especially to their dreams. Then invite them to write a paragraph about what made that teacher different or how that teacher affected them, and share it with the class.

2. Draw a Venn Diagram of Jolly and LaVaughn, comparing and contrasting them and their situations. (You may want to do this in conjunction with #1). Ask students to write an organized paragraph with details to support their main idea, based on this diagram.

3. Many people have very strong feelings about welfare. Certainly Jolly does. Find the times in the book that the topic is mentioned, and jot down the page number of each. Then divide the group into small groups (to begin, two in a group works best) and use a Discussion Web to respond to the following question:

   Is welfare a trap to those who "get on it"and a complete dead-end? Yes or no.

   Help students to list ideas for both sides but to use analytical skills and not just emotion to come to their final conclusion.

4. On the top of Chapter 54, Jolly does something that LaVaughn doesn't expect. Why do you think she behaves this way? What has caused this change? Stop and predict what is going to happen if this change continues.

5. For a class discussion, ask the following: What difference does family make? Think, as a group, about Jolly's situation and LaVaughn's situation.

6. End the unit with a Mother's Party. Ask each student to invite one person (their mother or their grandmother or some other mother they respect) and to bring some food to pass. When you are gathered, ask some of the mothers to talk about their child-rearing situations and what one thing was the most helpful to them.

Field Testing

The book was field-tested in three inner city GRADS classes of teenage parents. Their ages ranged from 15 to 17 years of age and they were enrolled in the 9th through 11th grades. There was one male student. They spent their entire Friday class periods reading Make Lemonade.

Teacher's Changes:

Class discussions included very practical applications of the themes of the book. For example, the students talked about the services available from family agencies. They compared how child care is provided by these agencies and by the high school that they were attending.

Student Responses:

Only one student declined to read aloud in the group. Toward the end of the book when she volunteered to read, she had difficulty and asked her classmates for help. The teacher observed that the student felt more like a member of the group after this shared experience with the book.

The teacher also commented that class attendance was more consistent during the period of reading the book.

Publication Information: Paper - ISBN 0-590-48141-X, Dell, New York, 1993.

Reminders: ABLE teachers can order this book from Book Wholesalers, Inc. for 40% off list price. For other recommended books, see Recommended Trade Books for Adult Literacy Programs, available from ABLE Directors, public librarians, or online <**http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/Resc/Trade/index.html**>. Call the OLRC for details.

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DR-TA: DIRECTED READING-THINKING ACTIVITY*

Overview: Predicting, reading, proving; divergent thinking to convergent thinking

Materials: Fiction lending itself to prediction works well initially. After students are accustomed to DR-TAs, selections from content textbooks or other nonfiction can also be used. The teacher should decide beforehand where students will stop to discuss and predict.

Procedures:

1. Students read selection title (and perhaps a bit of the selection) and make predictions about content.

2. Students read to first predetermined stop. They confirm, refine, or reject their initial hypotheses and justify their ideas with reference to the text. Students then make new hypotheses.

3. Students read the next section and follow procedures in step two. This cycle continues until text is read.

4. Follow-up activities may be completed after the text is read.

Notes: The teacher should facilitate (but not direct) thinking by asking questions such as, What do you think? Why do you think so? Can you prove it?

The teacher may summarize points that students make during the discussion, but should take care not to let his or her values or interpretations dominate. The teacher's role is to foster thoughtful student participation.

The teacher should not preteach vocabulary, set the purpose for reading, or ask the questions found in the teacher's manual.

*: The DL-TA, Directed Listening-Thinking Activity, proceeds in the same manner. The only difference is that the teacher reads the text to students.

For more information, see Stauffer, Russell G., Directing Reading Maturity as a Cognitive Process. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

K-W-L INSTRUCTION STRATEGY

PURPOSE

This strategy is designed to help students become more involved in reading expository material. As a group, students write out and/or discuss what they know, what questions they want answered, and what they have learned from reading the text.

PROCEDURE

1. Engage students in a discussion of what they as a group already know about the concept being introduced.

2. List what students know in the K column of the chart.

3. Note disagreements and questions in the W column as questions they want to have answered. If necessary, ask students what they want to learn and record responses (as questions) in the W column.

4. Direct students to read text and jot down information they learn as well as new questions that arise.

5. Engage students in a discussion of what they have learned from reading. Summarize the discussion in the L column of the chart.

K-W-L

WHAT WE KNOW	WHAT WE WANT TO FIND OUT	WHAT WE LEARNED

Source: Ogle, D. (1986). K-W-L: A teaching model that develops active reading of expository text. The Reading Teacher, 38, 564-570.

Know	Want to know	Learned